

The Christian Fellowship of Healing (Scotland) worked from the early 1950's to support and spread the healing ministry within churches and to encourage engagement with the medical profession. To further these aims a centre was run in Edinburgh where people could come for prayer, listening and healing. A loving and supportive prayer community formed, which came to an end in 2011. This document is part of a legacy of resources which we hope will support others in their engagement with the healing ministry. More archived material is available to the public at the National Library of Scotland.

Spiritual disciplines

By Ian Cowie (Chaplain 1976-88)

How to approach prayer as a discipline.

Why discipline?

We need not be afraid of the word "discipline" ([1](#)) when we realise its primary meaning is training. In the Fellowship we are trying to train ourselves to be people through whom the Spirit of God can work in the world. We want to receive this spiritual power which is God's gift, but even God cannot give it unless we are there and in a fit state to receive it. Our part is to make ourselves fit. Just as we would have to train physically for a marathon by going out jogging every day, so we have to train spiritually. The means in this case are prayer and meditation, study and fasting.

Another meaning of discipline is the keeping of rules for the achieving of order. Here we have to watch out. Keeping the rules degenerates so easily into legalism --- keeping the rule for the sake of keeping it rather than for the sake of what it is meant to achieve. It helps if we clarify what these objectives are. The object of prayer and meditation is to open our heart to God so that it may become changed and we may become "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Study helps us to hear what God is saying. Fasting helps us to fix our attention on Him with an unclouded eye.

Making time and space

It is important deliberately to set aside some part of every day for these spiritual disciplines. In these times when distractions are legion this is not easy, even for retired people and those living alone. For many, the only solution is to get up early or to stay up late, according to temperament. The ideal is an hour of "solitude" when there are no door or phone bells ringing and no domestic duties calling one away. Readers of Cameron Peddie's classic "The Forgotten Talent" will recall that it was his sudden awareness of Jesus' word "Can you not watch one hour with me?" which constituted his call to the healing ministry which he developed with such power.

Former CFH Resources can be found at:

www.st-cuthberts.net | www.mindandsoul.info
www.emmaushouse-edinburgh.co.uk

Many people are helped by setting up a prayer place with a picture, a cross, or a candle on which to focus. One should have a Bible handy, and preferably also a concordance so that biblical phrases which spring to mind can be quickly tracked down. A devotional book or a book of set prayers may be useful, especially at first. It is important to have one's material collected together at hand (including a list of people to be prayed for) to avoid the distraction of having to get up to look for things. It is also important to arrange the right physical conditions. We must be comfortable, warm enough, and without distractions from outside. That usually means sitting straight and well-supported in a favourite chair with the telephone off the hook. One teacher used to say we should sit down as if we were going to sit for a thousand years --- or even just until tomorrow!

Forms of prayer

There are many styles of prayer and it is up to you to choose the one(s) which suit you best. If you are busy you may do much of your praying while you are doing other things, but here we are thinking about how to approach prayer as a discipline when you are doing nothing else. Often we find a form of prayer which seemed to be just right grows stale on us after a time. This probably means that growth is taking place in us and we have come to a point where we must move on.

We generally think of prayer as being vocal. We may like to use set forms from a prayer book, or use one of the prayers in the Bible, or make up our own prayer. We may then pass on to telling God about our concerns for the day ahead or reviewing the day that is past, asking forgiveness for our failures and giving thanks for our joys. Some people like to organise their prayer in some way, so that they remember everything they wish to pray for. One such system involves starting with God and working inwards --- praying for world issues, local issues, neighbours, then finally themselves. Others use alphabet- or finger-based mnemonics, or a church service outline. Such organisation is not necessary and should not be stuck to too rigidly, but can be helpful.

Using the Bible

Another way of stimulating prayer is to start by studying a short Bible passage and either repeating it to yourself or else thinking about what the people who wrote it might have been trying to say, and what it means to you now. This should not be an intellectual exercise aiming for historical accuracy, but rather open yourself to God and ask Him what He wants you to get out of the passage today.

One very good way to approach God is to "pray the Psalms". The whole range of human emotion is expressed in them. We too should bring our emotions to God and not attempt to suppress them.

Silent prayer

While most of us feel the need to vocalise our prayer at least some of the time and especially to begin with, there comes a time when we feel that we are using our heads too much. We want to be released from the tyranny of too many words. Just to "be still" sounds so simple. But the minute we try to make a determined effort to sit still looking at God, we find out how difficult it is. Spending time in vocalised prayer or Bible study is often a good way to get started. Then we place a chosen sentence before us which we repeat slowly, with attention, to keep the inevitable distractions at bay and our mind concentrated on God.

Inevitably our restless minds will begin to rush all over the place, reminding us of a hundred and one things we ought to do now instead of "just sitting". We do need to arrange matters so that the time can be wholly set aside for God, and not allow even the worthiest busyness to make us depart from it. We are often so much more courteous in keeping our appointments with strangers than we are with our appointments with God. When we do lose the place, as is bound to happen, we must return gently to repeating the sentence again with renewed attention, as many times as is necessary. A monk wrote long ago that a time of prayer spent solely in returning the mind to God is perhaps the most valuable. We have to remember that He is faithful to His promises: if we will be still, He ensures that we shall know Him. If we come to Him, He will give us His peace.

Spiritual growth

We need to come to the silence in eager anticipation and expectancy, but with absolutely no preconceived ideas about things happening in the silence. We cannot expect to be in the Presence of God and for nothing to happen, but we do have to remember that we are to worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), not looking for excitements but relying on His power to renew and regenerate in the secret places of heart and mind and body.

Meditation is part of a growing process of coming to know God, that He may begin to fulfil in us Christ's command: "Be perfect" (Mt. 5:48). Transformations may take place overnight, but are more likely to require our devoted perseverance over a period of time --- say for the rest of our lives! It therefore makes sense to take time regularly each day to "wait upon your God always" (Hos. 12:6) until He can deepen our trust, awaken our soul to His presence, and draw us to Him so irrevocably that we can no longer face nor cope with the day without our times of silence with Him.

Fasting

Although fasting is a strange idea to many of us, it has always been part of all the great religious traditions and was certainly practised often in Biblical times. Praying through an occasional mealtime instead of eating can concentrate the mind wonderfully, and most of us won't miss the calories! It can be done to emphasise some personal prayer, as an act of

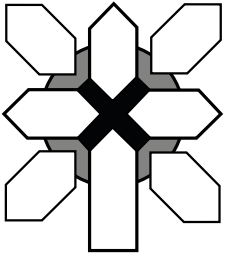
repentance or of solidarity with the poor, or on a special day. The terrible beauty of Good Friday is sharpened by fasting, and Easter then becomes a true feast. However if you intend fasting for more than the odd meal you should take time to prepare properly. "God's Chosen Fast" by Arthur Wallis is an excellent book which goes into motivations and practicalities in some detail.

Come Holy Spirit

Lord, we open ourselves before You now,
asking you to flow into every part of our lives,
healing and raising us up into Yourself,
that we may seek to serve each other as You serve us.
Give us the courage to discipline ourselves
and to be Your representatives in every walk of life,
to be able to see in each other the vision of Christ,
to be able to hold out the arms of love and caring
to all who come within our reach and, in intercession, beyond.
Teach us to look ever to the Cross
and beyond to Your resurrection power,
to offer that power of healing love to others,
and to seek Your direction at all times.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Footnote

1. *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster is recommended for those who want more information about any of the topics mentioned here.



Credo

used by the

Christian Fellowship of Healing (Scotland)

The Christian Fellowship of Healing:

is united in its commitment to the practice of prayer as the foundation of all our ministry.

Prayer is the means through which we believe the Holy Spirit can use us, here and now, to continue the practice of healing incarnated by Jesus.

is an ecumenical group of Christians who openly embraces a range of theological understanding and language to describe 'how' God heals.

We accept that health and healing can and does come through medicine, counselling, complementary therapies and other means. This does not negate the real contribution of prayer, rather it upholds the role of prayer to support individuals to listen to the Holy Spirit within them, guiding them, facilitating health and healing.

is committed to being alongside people who are suffering and experiencing pain, struggle and distress whatever their background.

We acknowledge that suffering faces us all and challenges our understanding and belief. Yet we can, with integrity, offer reassurance of God's loving presence accompanying every human being as seen in Christ who has shown us the capacity of God to be vulnerable even to the point of death. Living in and from this truth of the ever present loving God we respond as authentically as possible from our hearts, and we can offer an understanding of the range of meaning of healing which includes miracles.

is convinced of the importance of the varied aspects of healing displayed by Jesus in the miracle stories.

This includes an intense personal encounter with Jesus; affirmation of the individual as a person of value, physical healing, restoration of meaning and purpose, social inclusion; as well as challenge to those in power; confronting rigid thinking and lack of compassion. We believe all these components are aspects of the transforming love of God and reflect the wholeness Jesus calls us into. We see healing as deeply linked with the Christian tradition of vocation through which the living God calls each of us to discover and fulfil our potential.

is united in our understanding that healing in the New Testament includes wholeness.

This links the transforming love that effects miracles with the transforming love that brings the disciples through their fear and resistances into their ministry of apostleship. Our experience is that the practice of prayer in small groups, with a commitment to sharing and listening, enables those of us offering healing prayer to grow in ourselves and in our capacity to experience and share God's love. This includes the reality that some people have a gift of healing and a greater capacity than average to bring about healing.
